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ABSTRACT

Examined were differences between 36 Tennessee kindergarten and first-grade teachers' us of student groupings and instructional time. Teachers were observed twice at the beginning of the school year and once again approximately 8 weeks later. Eight observers collected data using the Stallings Observation Instrument, a measure consisting of: (1) a 60-second classroom scan recording observations of 14 classroom variables; and (2) a 5-minute observation (FMI) of all interactions involving the teacher. Five FMIs were recorded during each class period, each preceded by a classroom scan. Results of two-dimensional analysis of variance with repeated measures indicated that statistically significant differences existed between grade levels in student gouping patterns. Additionally, first-grade teachers utilized small group instruction more extensively than did kindergarten teachers; the converse was true for instruction involving whole classes. No significant differences were found between kindergarten and first-grade teachers' use of instructional time. Teachers' mean scores on time use in both groups were very similar as were the mean scores of each category of interactive instruction. Implications for teacher education and inservice training are discussed. (RH)

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Student Groupings and Instructional Strategies of Kindergarten and First-Grade Teachers

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Paper presented at the Annual meeting of the Association for Childhood Education International, Research Forum, Salt Lake City, Utah, April, 1988

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Abstract

This study examined differences between kindergarten and first-grade teachers' use of student groupings and instructional time. The sample included 18 kindergarten and 18 first-grade teachers from across the state of Tennessee. Teachers were observed two times each at the beginning of the school year and again ten weeks later during reading and/or language arts lessons in order to gather post-data. Post-data was collected in order to determine changes in strategies from the beginning of the year. Nine trained, naive observers collected data using the Stallings Observation Instrument. Two-dimensional analysis of variance with repeated measures was the method utilized to examine data. Results indicated that there were statistically significant differences between grade-levels in student grouping patterns, but no significant differences in use of instructional time. Implications for teacher education and inservice training are included.

Student Groupings and Instructional Strategies of Kindergarten and First-Grade Teachers

Kindergarten may no longer be children's first school experience. Some research advocated viewing kindergarten as a "part of the early childhood continuum" (Herman, 1984, p. 34). There is, however, general agreement that pressures of the academically oriented curriculum in kindergarten are a major contributor to failure and frustration among kindergarten children (Cruikshank, 1986; Federlein, 1984; Seefeldt, 1985; Werner, 1984).

For over 100 years, the goals and philosophy of kindergarten in American education have emphasized the uniqueness of this educational experience. One of the most common elements of kindergarten philosophy has been the child-centered approach, with a stronger emphasis on the individual development of the child than on specific content to be learned by all children. As early as 1972, however, Spodek stated that "most educators view kindergarten as a necessary downward extension of the elementary school which includes subject matter periods for the teaching of reading, writing, and mathematics" (p. 36).

Gullo, Bersani, Bayless, and Clements (1985) concluded: With the growing numbers of children having some

> kind of educational experience before kindergarten (pre-school/day care), it is crucial that we look critically at kindergarten. The findings of this study, along with cited findings, indicated that an all-day experience is not detrimental to 5-year-olds, in fact, they probably benefit academically. Keeping in mind appropriate developmental experience, it is crucial that reevaluate what an appropriate kindergarten experinece is--the standards of the past no longer apply. (p. 21)

The past function of kindergarten was to provide children with their first school experience. Presently, kindergarten must account for the diverse abilities of today's 5-year-olds. Naron (1981) concluded that "the new function of kindergarten requires more instructional time and better instructional tools than existed in traditional half-day kindergarten settings" (p. 307).

The research clearly indicates a shift in kindergarten curriculum. Although kindergarten has traditionally been viewed as "a garden for children", there is no research to date which indicates the types of instructional strategies utilized in kindergarten nor ways which kindergarten teachers utilize instructional time. If, indeed, this shift is occurring, research comparing kindergarten and first grade teachers'

instructional strategies and utilization of instructional time would specify possible likenesses and differences. In other words, what makes kindergarten different? Is there a move away from the garden? Is kindergarten one more grade within the elementary school? The following questions were investigated. Data were gathered using the Stallings Observation Instrument (Stallings, 1975).

1. Are there significant differences in time spent by kindergarten and first-grade teachers in: (a) working alone, (b) individualized instruction, (c) small groups, (d) large groups, and (e) whole class instruction (e.g., everybody)?

2. Are there significant differences in time spent by kindergarten and first-grade teachers in interactive instruction?

These questions were also examined concerning changes in kindergarten and first-grade teachers from pre- to postdata collection.

Method

Sample

Two kindergarten and two first-grade teachers from eight schools, and one kindergarten and one first-grade teacher from two additional schools, participated in the study for a total of 18 kindergarten and 18 first-grade

teachers. Teachers were from 10 different schools representing suburban and urban school districts in five counties across Tennessee. Schools were randomly chosen from a list provided by school administrators. Teacher participation, however, was voluntary.

Instrumentation

The Stallings Observation Instrument (SOI, Stallings, 1975) is a sophisticated low-inference instrument, designed to specifically record interactions of the teacher with the students, and contains two major components: the Snapshot and the Five-Minute Interaction (FMI). The Snapshot is a 60-second scane of the entire classroom and is recorded before each of the 5-minute interactions. The Snapshot includes 14 variables associated with the types of activities occurring, materials used, grouping patterns, and with whom the teacher and pupils are involved. The FMI includes all interactions involving the teacher. One FMI is recorded for a 5-minute interval and five FMIs are recorded during the class period. During the observation, the number of interactions recorded may vary from a minimum of 250 to a maximum of 360, with 300 being average for most observers. There are a total of 31 variables on the FMI (Bush, 1984). During the coding of the FMI, the teacher

is the center of attention and only interactions involving the teacher are recorded.

The instrument (SOI) was originally designed to measure the level of teachers' implementation of 12 Head Start and Follow Through Models (Stallings, 1977). The SOI has been used by various researchers to determine teaching behaviors, teacher change, and effective teaching strategies (Bush, 1984; Nason, 1986; Sirotnik, 1983; Stallings, 1980; Stallings & Kaskowitz, 1974; Stallings & Mohlman, 1981; Stallings, Needles, & Fairweather, 1978; Stringfield, Teddlie, & Suarez, 1985). The instrument is chiefly used in conjunction with the Stallings' Staff Development Program, "The Effective Use of Time Workshop" (Stallings, 1986).

The SOI provides valuable information for teachers concerning specific behaviors exhibited during classroom observations. As other researchers discovered, the instrument assists in analyzing teacher behaviors, student groupings, the types of materials and activities occurring during classroom instruction, as well as the percentage of time spent by teachers in various classroom tasks and activities.

Procedure

Procedures to achieve the purpose and objectives of this study required observation of kindergarten and

first-grade teachers' use of instructional time during reading/language arts lessons. Observations were conducted at the beginning of the school year and approximately 8 weeks later to assess if changes occurred in kindergarten and first-grade teachers' use of instructional time.

Observations were scheduled in advance with the cooperation of the classroom teacher to ensure that observations would coincide with reading and/or language arts instruction. Teachers designated the date and time of each observation. Eight naive observers trained and highly familiar with the utilization of the SOI collected data. Two observations per teacher were conducted within 2 weeks of the commencement of the school year to obtain beginnning of school data. Observations were conducted within a period of 4 consecutive days. Teachers were observed a second time by a different observer approximately 8 weeks after the initial data collection. Upon completion of the experiment and data analysis, individual teacher profiles were shared with each participant.

Two dimensional analysis of variance with repeated measures on one factor was the technique selected for data analysis. Each hypothesis had one between-subjects factor, Grade Level Taught (G) and one within-subjects factor, Time (T), which accounted for pre and

post time periods. The tests of assumptions for repeated measures are discussed with each hypothesis. All hypotheses were examined at the .05 level of significance.

Results

There were significant differences between kindergarten and first-grade teachers in utilization of various student groupings (F = 18.47, p, < .05). There was also a significant interaction between grade level taught and mode of instruction (F = 10.91, p, < .05). First-grade teachers utilized small group instruction more extensively than did kindergarten teachers and the converse was true for instruction involving the whole class (See Appendix A).

No significant differences were found between kindergarten and first-grade teachers' use of instructional time. Mean scores of teachers in both groups were very similar as were the mean scores of each category of interactive instruction (See Appendix B).

Discussion

The absence of agreement between kindergarten and first grade teachers' utilization of instructional modes echoes earlier recognition that the research is framented and sparse comparing kindergarten and first-grade

teaching strategies. Kindergarten and first-grade teachers' utilization of instructional modes differed in this study. Kindergarten teachers were observed in whole class instruction significantly more often than any other mode of instruction during the pre- and postdata collection periods. Although this finding is dissimilar to the instructional mode most often utilized in first-grade, it does parallel Evertson, Emmer, Clements, Sanford, and Worsham's (1984) statement that "limited time, the problem of ascertaining individual differences on relevant entering skills, and greater procedural complexity may make small-group instruction less efficient than whole class instruction" (p.134).

No previous studies were found indicating kindergarten teachers' utilization of student groupings; however, this study indicated that kindergarten teachers utilize whole class instruction during reading and/or language arts lessons. Teachers in kindergarten employed high frequencies of direct instruction techniques during these reading and/or language arts lessons.

No significant differences were found between kindergarten and first-grade teachers in time spent in interactive instruction. This finding was highlighted by further similarities between kindergarten and first-grade teachers in the patterns of interactive instruction.

Similar to Marzano's (1984) findings, time spent by teachers in this investigation in interactive instruction did not change from pre- to postdata collection. Also similar to Marzano (1984), teachers in the present study spent less time in postdata collection "reviewing assignments" and their time spent in "practice/drill" increased considerably for both groups from pre- to postdata collection. Concerns regarding the degree of similarity betweem grade levels were previously noted by Cruikshank (1986), Federlein (1984), Seefeldt (1985), and Werner (1984).

Implications

The results of this study can be translated into several suggestions for teacher educaiton and the classroom teacher. Since kindergarten teachers in this study tended not to use a wide variety of grouping patterns, teacher training programs should provide an array of experiences in which preservice teachers may observe participate, and practice variations in student groupings in order to meet the diverse needs of young children.

It is further recommended that kindergarten teachers reexamine their mode of instruction during pre-reading/language arts lessons. These teachers may discover that small group instruction is a more effective

way to teach reading readiness skills in a less "structured" more developmentally-appropriate setting.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT GROUPINGS

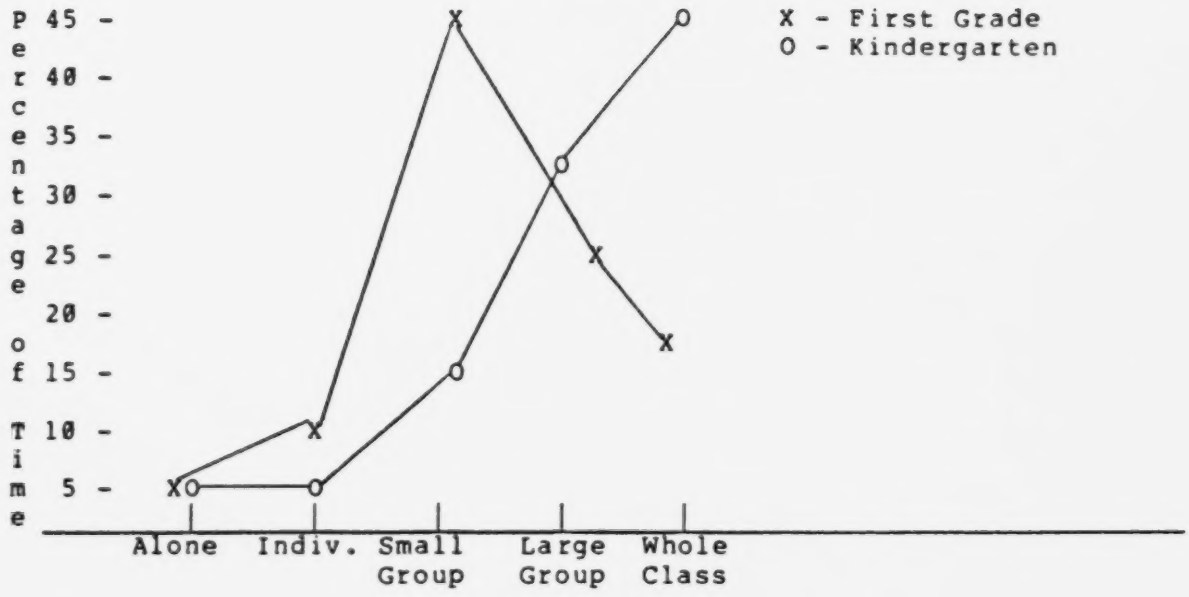
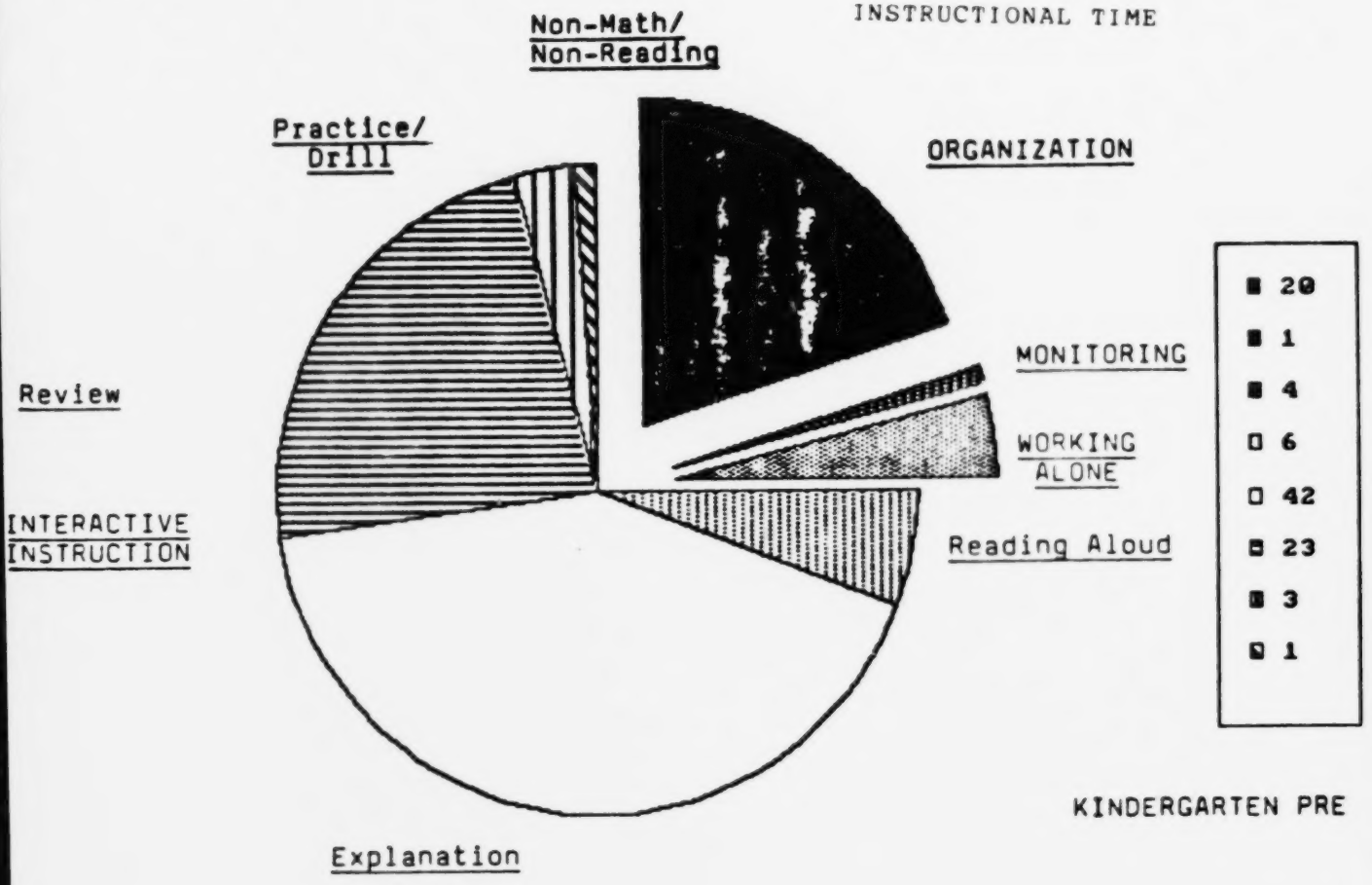


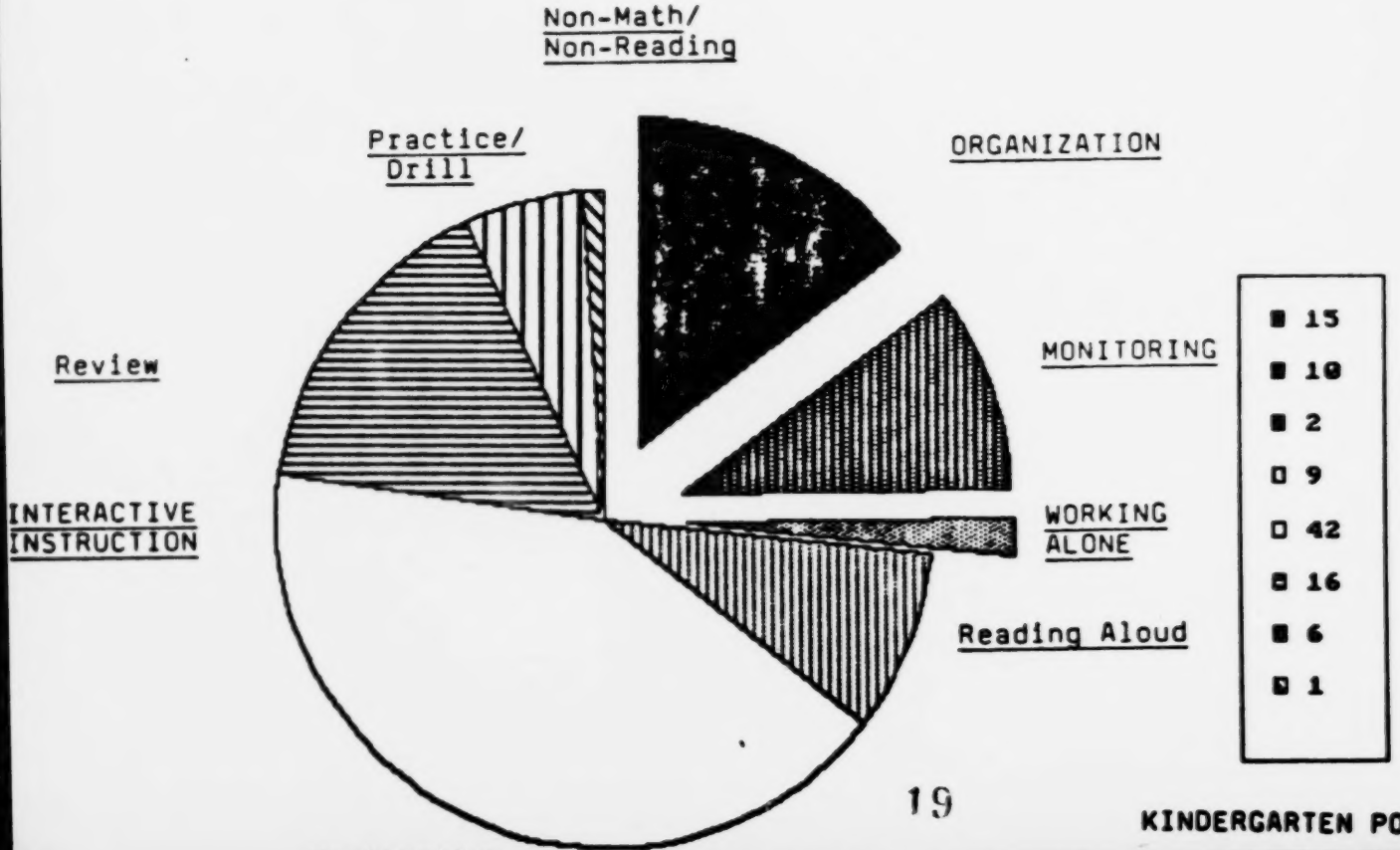
Figure 1. Interaction of grade level and instructional mode.

APPENDIX B

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME



KINDERGARTEN PRE



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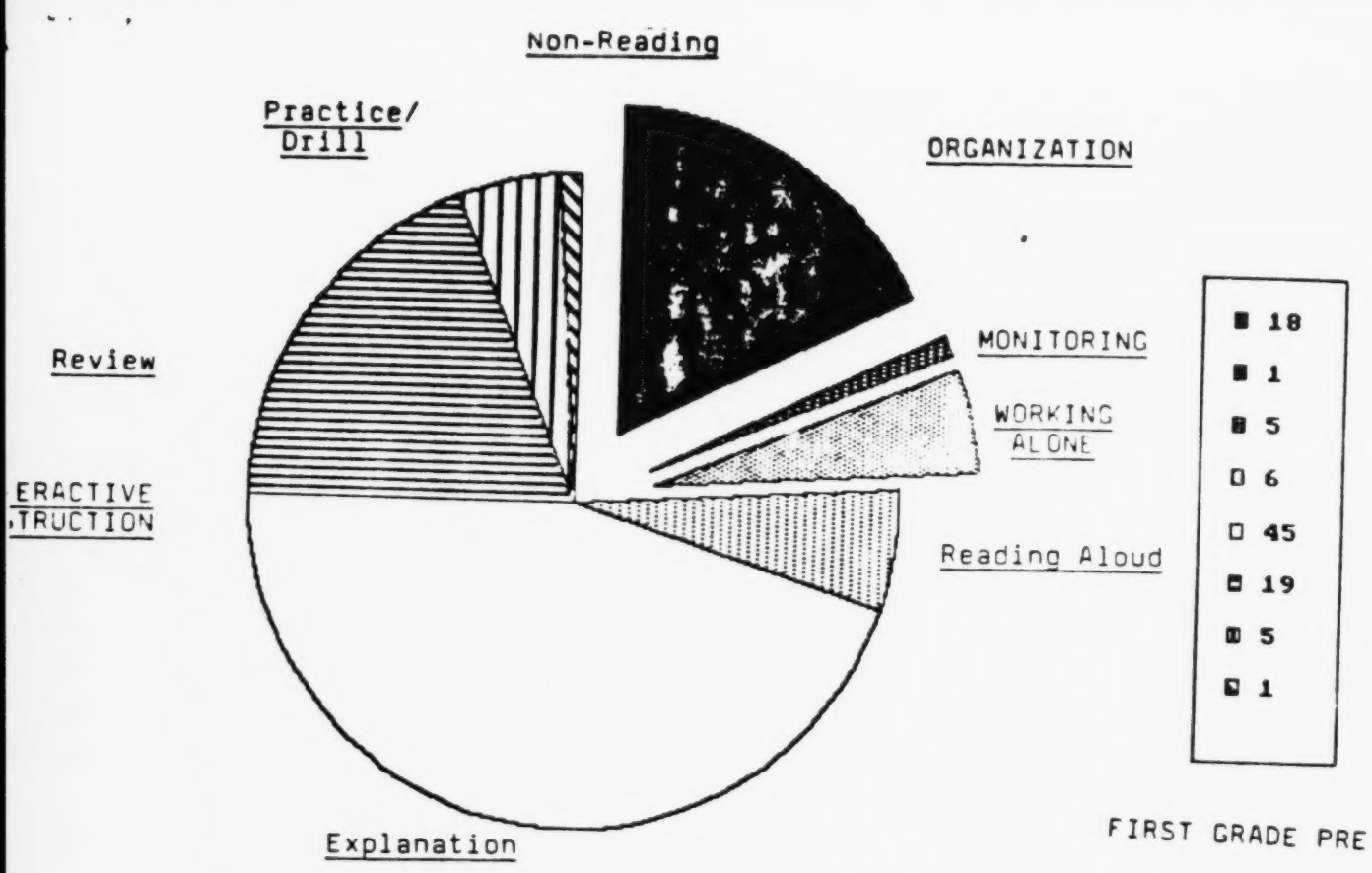
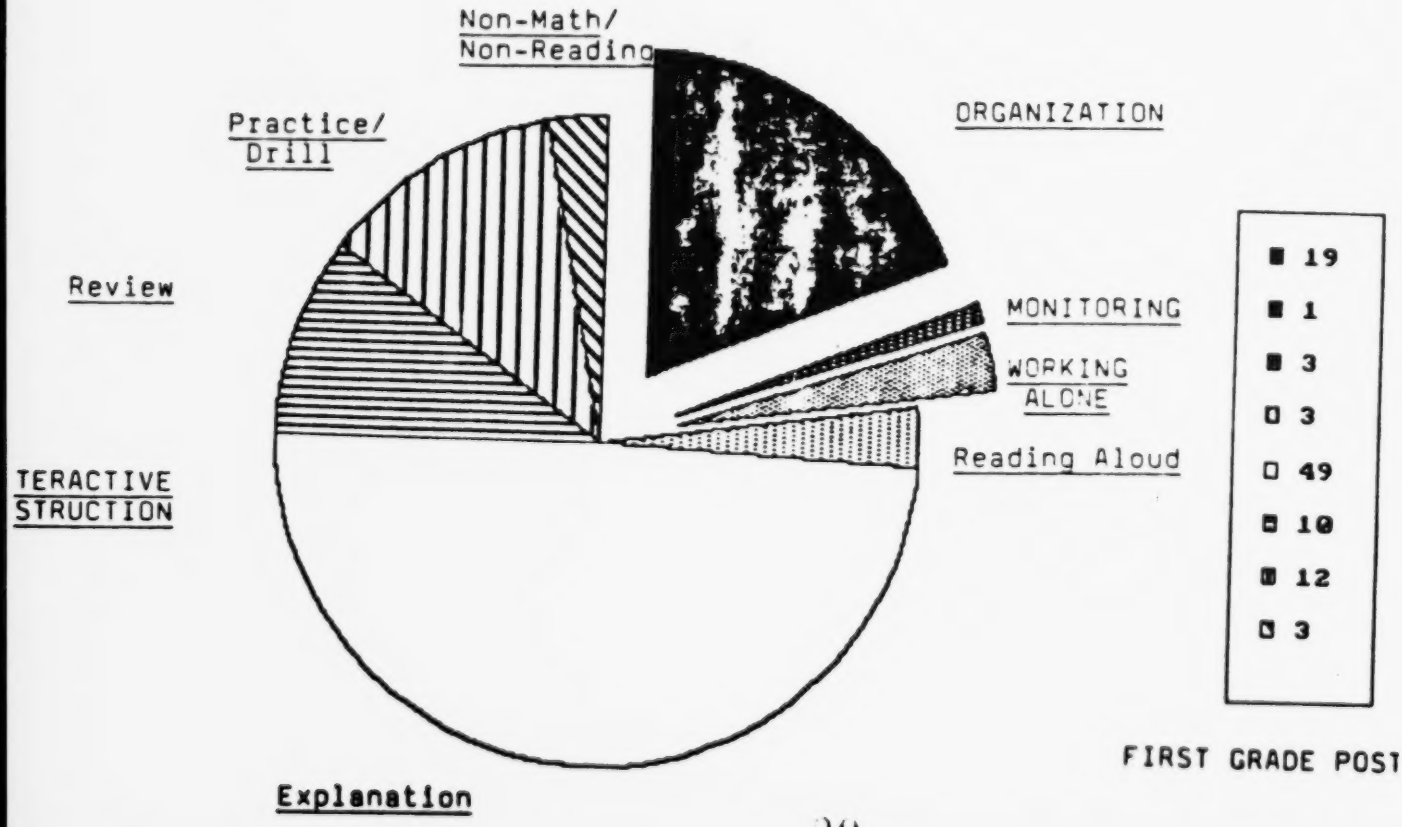


FIRST GRADE PRE



FIRST GRADE POST